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ADVERTISER
Montgomery, Alabama
December 15, 1959

Dr. Flemming's
Self-Assurance

SECRETARY Flemming and the Food & Drug Administration seem suddenly to have acquired a knack for spotting cancer-causing agents in popular consumer items.

First it was cranberries; a day or so ago, it was chickens.

Nobody would deny the Secretary the right and duty to inform the public of hazardous foods and drugs detected in the government's laboratories. Just the opposite, in fact; he should be inhibited in no way, no even by the fear of widespread economic loss.

But the manner in which Flemming wiped out the 1959 cranberry crop and put a cloud on the chicken and broiler industry makes his actions seem impetuous and even calculated. His announcements, as they reach the public, are unqualified conclusions offered in the simplest terms: X chemical fed to Y animal produces cancer.

In the cranberry blast, Flemming did not mention—nor ever deny to our knowledge—the cranberry industry's estimate that a person would have to consume something like 15,000 pounds of berries a day to be harmed by the chemical Flemming said was cancer-causing.

How many chickens fed with stilbestrol would have to be eaten to cause harm?

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OF THE methods by which Flemming arrived at his conclusions, the public knows little. But it is familiar enough with the cigaret controversy to know that Flemming's uncomplicated certainty is singular. Using tars and nicotine from tobacco, scientists have induced cancer in animals. But let a doctor conclude that this is proof of tobacco's effect on humans and he is almost certain to be challenged by an equally eminent authority.

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When the surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service recently blamed cigarettes for the increase in lung cancer, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* rebuked him, saying:

A number of authorities who have examined the same evidence cited by [the surgeon general] do not agree with his conclusions. Neither the proponents nor the opponents of the smoking theory have sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption of an all-or-none position.

With all else, it seems odd that Flemming should have discovered the damaging effects of the two chemicals so suddenly. Aminotriazole had been used for years, with the Department of Agriculture's approval if applied after harvesting. Stilbestrol was approved by the Food & Drug Administration 12 years ago. It seems a remarkable coincidence that Flemming should have perceived the danger of cranberries treated with aminotriazole a few days before Thanksgiving, and the danger of stilbestrol in chickens just a week or two later.

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IT IS no secret that Flemming wants new powers to carry out the policing of food and drugs. If he were less than a cabinet official of the U.S. government, it might be tempting to suspect that Flemming

SUN
Durham, North Carolina
December 11, 1959

From The Doctors

For what it is worth, the testimony of the American Medical Association, through its *AMA Journal*, is on the side of those who caution against hasty judgments on smoking. There is insufficient evidence, says the *Journal*, "to warrant the assumption" that cigarette smoking is the principal factor in the increase in lung cancer.

It questions the conclusions of the report by Dr. Leroy E. Burney, surgeon general of the U. S. Public Health Service. "A number of authorities who have examined the same evidence cited by Dr. Burney," says the medical publication, "do not agree with his conclusions. Although the studies reveal a relationship between cigarette smoking and cancer that seems more than coincidental, they do not explain why, even when some smoking patterns are the same, case rates are higher among men than among women and among urban than among rural populations."

The *Journal* advised close watching and the collection of more data. That seems advisable.

CITIZEN
Asheville, North Carolina
December 13, 1959

Lung Cancer

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We don't know about the rest of you, but we're getting a bit tired of the pro and con blasts having to do with the effects of smoking on lung cancer.

Dr. Jones says one day the link is unmistakable and his colleague, Dr. Smith, comes back the next day and says 'taint so.'

Dr. Leroy Burney, the nation's top public health officer, says it is only too true and a week or so later the voice of the American Medical Association says:

"Neither the proponents nor the opponents of the smoking theory have sufficient evidence to warrant the assumption of an all-or-none authoritative position."

If the medical profession can't agree on this (pardon the pun) burning issue, how can a poor layman help but be anything but confused, if not befuddled.

has carefully timed his recent actions to impress his request for new laws on the soon-to-convene Congress and to create an atmosphere most favorable to their passage.

As it is, Americans have no choice but to assume the good faith of the Secretary of Welfare, though they may wonder what bombshell he is saving for the next two weeks.